

Focus

THE SCOUT

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SECTION D



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Commandos with the 60th Iraqi Civil Defense Corps prepare to maneuver through the obstacle course at Camp Ramadi, Iraq, in 1st Marine Division Area of Responsibility.

The new Iraqi Homeland defenders

Soldiers help Iraqi Commandos hit the streets with Marines



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Iraqi Civil Defense Corps Commandos wait for instructions before practicing room-clearing techniques during training at Camp Ramadi, within 1st Marine Division's zone. Army drill sergeants with 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, a unit assigned to the 1st Marine Division, taught the 24-day Commando Course. The Commandos will begin real-world operations in the coming weeks.



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Army Staff Sgt. Richard A. Dycus, a drill sergeant with the Army's 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, assigned to the 1st Marine Division in Iraq, gives an Iraqi Civil Defense Corps Commando some pointers while the Commando low-crawls on the obstacle course here. Dycus, of Nashville, Tenn., native, has been in the Army for 10 years and has trained American soldiers for a good part of that time.



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An Iraqi Civil Defense Corps Commando prepares to clear a room during training at Camp Ramadi, within 1st Marine Division's Area of Responsibility. Army drill sergeants from 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, a unit assigned to the 1st Marine Division, trained the first group of Commandos. The first Commando Company belongs to the 60th ICDC Brigade.



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Iraqi Civil Defense Corps Commandos fight each other during hand-to-hand combat training at Camp Ramadi. Army drill sergeants assigned to the 1st Marine Division trained the ICDC's first Commando Company.

CAMP RAMADI, Iraq — Newly minted Iraqi Commandos are ready to work with Marines in Iraq against enemy forces, with a little help from soldiers.

Army Staff Sgts. Richard A. Dycus and Jack C. Harlan spent the better part of the military careers transforming "18-year-old American kids" into disciplined fighters.

Now they are in Iraq helping to improve the country's fledgling Iraqi Civil Defense Corps.

Harlan, Dycus and 18 fellow drill sergeants, who are here from Fort Knox, Ky., supporting the Army's 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division recently finished training Iraq's first Commando Company, which belongs to the 60th ICDC Brigade.

The 1st Brigade Combat Team is on duty in Iraq with the 1st Marine Division.

Now, Harlan and Dycus are preparing the company for real-world missions. The new Commandos will soon be working side-by-side with Marines and soldiers against the enemy.

According to Dycus, the company was developed to expand the ICDC's capabilities.

"Commandos are elite ICDC soldiers who have completed the first two phases of training," said 27-year-old Dycus. "The company was formed to handle more aggressive offensive type missions."

The ICDC was created after the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime to maintain Iraq's internal security. Most missions include manning checkpoints, convoy security and patrols.

"We handle very special and hard missions," Iraqi Maj. Durayd Khaldon Affat, Commando Company Commander, said. "Anything the other ICDC units can't handle we do it."

Commandos are trained to conduct raids, ambushes and other operations in an urban environment; skills the average ICDC soldier does not yet possess.

But becoming a commando proved to be more difficult than many of the ICDC soldiers originally thought.

Dycus and Harlan, who have almost 20 years of Army experience between them, began the 24-day training cycle with 114 ICDC soldiers but only graduated 41 men.

"We had to drop a lot of the guys during the assessment phase of the course," explained Dycus, of Nashville, Tenn. "They just couldn't handle the mental and physical challenges we placed on them."

The course was broken up into several phases. The first four days were designed to weed out those who wouldn't be able to live up to Commando expectations.

"The students were working on about four hours of interrupted sleep per night," said Harlan, a 27-year-old from Abingdon, Ill. "We tested them mentally and physically."

During the next phases, the remaining 41 ICDC soldiers, ranging from 16 to 60 years old, were taught first aid, individual movement techniques, hand-to-hand combat, squad level tactics, advanced rifle marksmanship and platoon movement tactics.

The drill sergeants used some of the same training techniques for the Commandos as they use to train American soldiers. Some of their tactics didn't have quite the same effect.

"Most of them didn't understand English," Harlan said. "When we yelled at them, nine times out of 10 they would just stand there and say 'yes.'"

Through the use of interpreters and hand gestures, the drill sergeants were able to get around the language barrier.

Following the 24-day training course, the ICDC soldiers were dubbed Commandos and given maroon berets to signify their elite status.

Maroon berets indicated Iraqi Republican Guard soldiers during Hussein's rule.

Unlike Republican Guard soldiers, the Commandos are interested in protecting a democratic Iraq.

"Many of the guys who join the ICDC are interested in the paycheck," Dycus explained. "The Commandos are very disciplined and want to fight insurgents who are against democracy. These guys are the best of the ICDC."

Affat said he and his men owe their future success to Harlan and Dycus.

"The drill sergeants gave us all the information we need and all the training to start doing real missions," he said. "After all this training, I know for sure we are definitely ready for the real thing."

Story by Cpl. Paula M. Fitzgerald